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Diem Ouster Documents Printed

The Chicago Sun-Times today disclosed two memos it said were written in 1963 by State Department aide Roger Hilsman outlining methods by which the United States could encourage and assist a coup against Ngo Dinh Diem, then president of South Vietnam.

The Sun-Times said it had obtained the State Department documents from the Citizens Commission of Inquiry into U.S. War Crimes in Vietnam. It said the documents had been declassified in 1968, but had been "tightly held" by the government.

The paper also said it has obtained some other documents derived from a secret Pentagon study of how the U.S. role in Vietnam escalated. It said the materials are similar to those obtained by the Boston Globe and Washington Post.

The Sun-Times story was written by Morton Kondracke and Thomas B. Ross.

The documents show that President John F. Kennedy decided at a National Security Council meeting in September

1963 to put "escalatory pressure on Diem to get rid of his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, chief of the secret police, the paper said. The Hilsman memos were written just before that meeting, it said.

Neutralization Seen

Hilsman's first memo, prepared for an Aug. 31 NSC meeting, warned that Diem might move to open "neutralization negotiations" with North Vietnam.

If North Vietnam threatened to intervene on Diem's side, Hilsman recommended, the United States should "let it be known unequivocally that we shall hit the DRV (North Vietnam) with all that is necessary to force it to desist."

If Diem chose to make a last stand, Hilsman urged his superiors to "encourage the coup group to fight the battle to the end and to destroy the palace if necessary to gain victory."

The Hilsman memos and the Pentagon documents illuminate a period of increasing U.S. dissatisfaction with

brother-in-law that began May 8 and ended with the Nov. 1 coup in which Diem and Nhu were assassinated.

On May 8, government forces fired on Buddhist celebrators in Hue and there ensued what became known as the Buddhist crisis, in which several priests and nuns burned themselves to death in the streets of major Vietnamese cities.

Pagodas Hit

On Aug. 21, nine days before Hilsman's first memo, government forces under the direction of Nhu and Diem attacked major Buddhist pagodas in Hue and Saigon, killing any monks who resisted.

Leading generals reported to U.S. officials that they feared Diem and Nhu might institute a purge within the military—and perhaps seek an accommodation with North Vietnam.

From the end of August until early October, the secret Pentagon study and Hilsman's second memo reveal, the United States struggled to decide how to keep Diem as president but get rid of Nhu, the paper reported.

Seek New Leaders

A conclusion of the Sept. 17 NSC meeting, for example, was that the best of all possible worlds would be for Diem to stay in power with Nhu out of the picture. After it was determined that Nhu's special forces and not the Army had been responsible for the attacks on the pagodas, the documents make it clear that there was unanimous agreement among Kennedy and his advisers that pressure should be applied on Diem to purge Nhu.

The documents indicate that it was also decided at the NSC meeting to identify and begin cultivating alternative leadership—believed to mean the generals.

The decision was made formal after two alternatives were debated at the Sept. 17 NSC meeting—"escalatory pressure" and "reconciliation," the latter representing acquiescence in the

status quo under Diem and Nhu. The alternatives had been laid out the day before in Hilsman's second memo.

"My own judgment," Hilsman declared, "is that the 'reconciliation track' will not work. I think Nhu has already decided on an adventure. I think he feels that the progress already made in the war and the U.S. material on hand gives him freedom to launch on a course that has a minimum and a maximum goal.

"The minimum goal would be sharply to reduce the American presence . . . and to avoid any meaningful concessions that would go against his mandarin, 'personalist' vision of the future of Vietnam.

His "maximum goal, I would think, would be a deal with North Vietnam for a truce in the war, a complete removal of the U.S. presence and a 'neutralist' or 'Titoist' but still separate South Vietnam."

The "escalatory pressure" track, as it was explained at the Sept. 17 NSC meeting, called for the withdrawal of Agency for International Development support for the Diem regime, the removal of support for NHU's CIA-backed Special Forces, and an order to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge to remain aloof from Diem.

Provide Plane

Hilsman's Aug. 30 memo recommended that, if Diem chose to leave the country with his family as pressures against him grew, the United States provide him with a plane but only if he agreed to go to France or another European country.

Hilsman warned that Diem might appeal to French President Charles De Gaulle "for political support for neutralization of Vietnam." Hilsman urged resistance to any such arrangement, adding: "We should point out publicly that Vietnam cannot be effectively neutralized unless the Communists are removed from control of North Vietnam . . ."

"Once an anti-Diem coup is can point to the obvious refusal of South Vietnam to accept a Diem-Communist coalition."